

# The Complete Field Guide to Stick and Leaf Insects of Australia

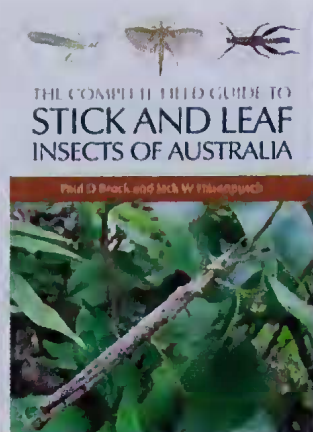
by Paul D Brock and Jack W Hasenpusch

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This excellent book serves an unusually wide audience: it manages to be accessible to beginners, whilst informing professional entomologists. It also acts both as a field guide and an aid to culturing stick insects (phasmids) in captivity. Phasmids fulfil an important role as invertebrate ambassadors because they seem to inspire less fear and revulsion than many other taxa. I used to keep several species on my desk at work, and was amazed at how easily they won over even the most hardened 'entomophobes'. They are also popular pets at many kindergartens and primary schools. It is therefore important that a reasonably priced and approachable book, such as this one, be available to fuel the interest of budding entomologists. This book should also be welcomed by those who want a summary of current taxonomic and biological knowledge about Australian phasmids.

The introductory section provides information mainly on phasmid anatomy and lifecycle. The text is chatty and well suited to beginners, although the grammar could be improved in places. The second chapter covers habitat and ecology, and the third chapter discusses collecting, preserving, photographing and rearing phasmids. This section includes some interesting information about the history of phasmid research in Australia, and mentions certain influential workers (e.g. Dodd and McCoy) who will be more familiar to naturalists for other reasons.

The guide to species (Chapter Four) forms the major part of the book. A quick reference guide to families and subfamilies is first presented, and is a handy short-listing tool for anybody attempting an identification. The actual species guide follows, conveniently presented in the same Family and Subfamily order as the quick reference pages. Strangely, the subfamily Extatosomatinae is omitted from the quick guide, although it is listed as a subfamily in the species identification pages (albeit within the Tropicoderinae, from which they were apparently recently separated).



The pages devoted to each species are excellent, and often include useful culture notes. Australian distributions only are given for most of the few species also present overseas, but it would have been better if their entire known distributions were listed. Apart from this very minor point, the reader could not want more.

Keys to genera and species are found in Appendix 1, and Appendix 2 presents information on phasmid systematics that will be useful for beginners. This section also contains a list describing the contributions made to phasmid studies by key literature (full details of each work, and additional literature, are given later in a reference section). Appendix 3 contains a checklist of Australian species. The book also includes a glossary, a list of associations catering to phasmid enthusiasts, and an index of common names.

The book is packed with good quality colour photographs, especially throughout the species guide section. The sheer body length of many species makes it difficult to capture the entire phasmid whilst showing detail sufficient for identification, but the insects are nevertheless clearly depicted here with judicious use of close-ups for diagnostic features.

This book is a 'must have' for any stick insect enthusiast, whether amateur or professional. It is also suitable for a worldwide audience, given that several Australian species are kept as pets overseas, and that some of the background information and taxonomic sections of the book can be generalised outside Australia.

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